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PRACTICAL PHONETICS IN JUNIOR COLLEGE FRENCH (Concluded)

III

On this occasion, it was my distinct impression that it would be better to begin our text at this point rather than to go through the consonants in order; this it seemed wiser to do by degrees, beginning with the consonantal sounds and symbols most likely to cause trouble. The order in which these are taken up is naturally determined by the vocabulary given in the text. If a word like **il** or **jardin** or **champ** comes in the first lesson it may be necessary to demonstrate at once [ɪ] or [ʒ] or [ʁ] or [S]. Another difficulty, and a serious one, may arise here: if the text to be used does not indicate in phonetic transcription the pronunciation of each word in the vocabularies, it is necessary to devote some time to teaching the class the various spellings for the sounds as they appear, especially for the vowels; in the case of a text so provided there is no particular need of such a halt during these beginning days, for the spellings are learned by the class as they are given, and the instructor has only to group them from time to time, when two or more have occurred for the same sound.

The text that we use for beginners, Fraser and Squair's *French Grammar*, gives the phonetic transcription of each vocabulary. In the first five lessons are the following words that demand immediate attention, either because of the difficulty of pronouncing certain consonants in them or because the symbols give trouble for one reason or another: **crayon**, **voilà**, **chaise**, **aujourd'hui**.⁵ Hence, in addition to study and practice of all the vowels and their symbols, the class begins work at this point on the difficult sounds [ʁ], [ɪ], [w], [ʉ], and must note especially the symbols [j], [S], [ʒ],

⁵For obvious reasons it is needless to comment here on the objections to several of the consonantal symbols in the *Alphabet* de l'association internationale.

which are not so easily recognized. Of the very troublesome sounds or symbols, only [p] remains unnoticed, and as this does not occur until lesson 12 (except in the list on p. 2), it need not be considered before it is needed. It will occur to every teacher, of course, that there are other consonants than those named which might logically be discussed here: for example, the true French sounds represented by the symbols [t], [d], [n]; the proper way of uttering [b], [p]. The advisability of doing this, however, is open to question. When there is so much new material that must be presented, as during these first days, the instructor may sometimes be illogical with profit.

This order of treating the consonants applies naturally to a particular text-book: a different vocabulary, another order. Thus one may conceive of a beginner's book in which the difficulties of pronunciation would be graduated, and the different sounds be presented in small groups with appropriate exercises, but the present article is merely a record of what is done in an actual case.

Of the consonants selected as needing particular study from the first, the following present difficulties in the sound: [q], [w], [ɪ], [r], [ʃ], and [ʒ], and have to be described and practised as diligently as the vowels. For the first of these (which may conveniently be called [qi] in the class room), as for [q], the important elements are forward tongue position and vigorous lip rounding. The instructor shows how increased tension, which causes the lips to advance slightly and to assume a puckered aspect, as if a draw string were being applied, leaving only a tiny hole at the center, enables him to pass from [y] to [q], the difference in sound being detected by the class even when the instructor's back is turned to the room. The well-known exercise of going from [y] to [i] (or from [y] to [ɛ] and from [y] to [a], as in **cruel, suave**) more and more rapidly until the two make one sound is a good one. The energetic pressure of the lips against one another, except for the tiny center opening, must be emphasized repeatedly.

Then lists of words containing the sound are put on the board and practised. The instructor turns his back to the class and pronounces **suite** and the English **sweet, cuir** and the English **queer**, or similar pairs in order to rouse the students' ears to the very apparent difference between the French and English sounds. They are usually keen on exercises of this kind and are led to make

their own efforts more vigorous. The reason for turning around is obvious; the mouth position would betray the sound that is being pronounced.

A similar treatment is accorded to [w]: the important thing here is to distinguish it from English w, and the differing lip position is to be stressed. If position is taken for [u] and a similar tightening process takes place as in going from [y] to [ʏ], the resulting sound should be satisfactory. The lips are thrust out further than for the last sound and the center hole is slightly larger. Contrasts may be made as above: **oui** and English **we**, **soit** and **swat**. It is well to choose for practice words in which a preceding bilabial encourages lip rounding: **bois, pois, moi, poêle**; for drilling on [y] one would give **puis, buisson, depuis, puits**.

The greatest difficulty in the way of a good pronunciation of these sounds is the almost invincible slothfulness of our lip muscles, and this must be the point of the most vigorous attack. To students who have mastered [y] the tongue position of [ʏ] is not impossible.

It is easier to get a fairly good [l], though not easy to inculcate good habits in respect to this sound. The students are asked to pronounce **bell** holding the tongue tip against the palate as the end of the word finds it. Then they are asked to say the same word, tightening up the muscles as for French and with the tongue tip very lightly touching the cutting edge of the upper teeth. The result is **belle** (or **bel**). They see the difference at once and distinguish between **bell** and **belle**, **ell** and **elle**, **eel** and **il**, the front vowels simplifying the necessary shift of position. The reader sees readily why end-position is emphasized in these examples: [l] initial or in groups is less troublesome.⁶

When we get to [p] the chief point is not to heed the time honored precept that it is made like **ny** in **onion**, but to insist that the student's tongue must not touch his palate in **agneau**, for example, until the second syllable is reached. At that moment the blade is placed somewhat firmly against the hard palate, the tip touching the upper teeth and visible in the opening, in contrast to what is true in English position. Words containing high front vowels are best for practising this sound as (**digne dignité**), and it must be

⁶See the article by J. L. Barker, *Modern Philology*, Nov., 1916, p. 413.

insisted that it is made in one solid block, as opposed to the English **ny** of **canyon**, which is divided between the two syllables.

What directions are we to give for the [r]? Shall we teach or try to teach our classes the uvular sound? Most teachers with whom I talk seem to be in the habit of explaining both this and the tip [r] to their students, of telling them that it is absolutely necessary to pronounce one or the other of these audibly, and of leaving the choice to them. This has a certain advantage, for it is easier for some students to sound [R] than [r], and occasionally a teacher encourages the pupils to practise the [R] out of class and rewards those who succeed in acquiring it. Another competent teacher in a secondary school is undertaking to introduce the [R] to his classes generally, to the exclusion of the other.

It is my practice, however, to devote my energies to the [r], as being nearer the American speech habit and as being as thoroughly a French sound, in quite as good standing as [R]. The class is told of the other and occasionally a student really desires to acquire it, in which he is encouraged, but class drill is centered on [r]. The method of demonstration is much as for [l]. The instructor pronounces several familiar words (as **Marie, Paris**) or one or two English words, as **bring, French, à la française**, which serves to bring to their ears at once the difference between the French way of sounding this consonant and their own. The students are then asked to pronounce a word like **cur**, keeping the tongue tip in the final position long enough to tell where it is. They try other words, and discover that the tongue tip in English is turned up toward the center of the hard palate and receives the vibration of the current of air from the throat. Then they are shown that for the [r] there is no such withdrawal and upward curving; that the tip is well forward in the mouth; and that it is easy to go from [i] to [r] by allowing the tip to rise slightly to a position behind the front teeth where it vibrates under the impetus of the current of air. This needs frequent demonstration and abundant practice, words in which the [r] is followed by a high vowel or preceded by a consonant formed in the alveolar region being helpful, as: **Marie, rire, triple, trou, trairer, irriter, drap**. Words like **trois, droit** present more difficulty because of the troublesome bilabial that follows. For students who wish to practise [R], one may suggest words like **écrire, gris, crème, gras**, in which the preceding con-

sonant helps in taking position, with the back of the tongue arched high to receive the current of air, or a series like **ca**, **ga**, **ra**, which tends to put the tongue in position.

It takes a long time to get satisfactory results for either sound, at least with students from the land of the cerebral [r]; toward the end of the first year the profit on our investment of effort begins to grow, and second year classes are often satisfying. It may be noted in passing that students from our southern or eastern states might have to be treated somewhat differently, especially from those parts of the South where certain vowels are noticeably diphthongised before [r], as in the Tennessee pronunciation of **hurt**, **first**, (**hœit**, **foeist**). Thus **meurtre** might yield [**mœitr**] in the mouth of a Nashvillian.

The usual directions for [S] and [ʒ], that is, to pronounce them respectively as **sh** in **shut** and **s** in **pleasure**, are hardly sufficient. The students are instructed to stick out their lips more vigorously than for these English sounds, with just the opposite of the puckered, drawn effect prescribed for [ʋ] and [w] (the lower lip is perceptibly advanced), and to keep the tongue point further forward than for **sh**. If the French sound be uttered close to a student's ear he will remark a slight whistling effect which is absent from the English.

For [ʒ] the process is similar with the addition of voice. In this connection it may be remarked that it has been not found necessary to do more than mention the phenomena of voicing, and in some such connection as this, for our students are not troubled to distinguish between surds and sonants. They mispronounce the letter **s** as in **maison**, very persistently, but that is merely eye-association.

These are the only consonants that demand especial treatment, in my presentation; the less troublesome sounds are commented on later and at less length, though the class learns to distinguish the sharper [t], [d], [n], from the corresponding English sounds, and to ascribe the difference to a changed tongue position accompanied by a more vigorous muscular action. Such differences are, however, more delicate, and may wait until second year for much attention. In such cases good phonograph records would be valuable, as also when the time comes to study intonation and sentence rhythm.

It is needless to say that from the first, attention is given to syllabication, meaning of accent marks, liaison, and the like, as well as to rules of thumb about final consonants, elision in monosyllables, syllable stress: these matters are taken up in any introduction to French pronunciation, whether handled from the physiological standpoint or not.

IV

The class has now been studying French for about three weeks. At some time during each recitation period the vowel triangle has been reviewed, individually and in chorus, forward and backward, and all the most troublesome consonants have been discussed and diligently practised in similar fashion. Since the phonetic symbols have been used in all this work to represent the sounds under discussion, these have been learned by the class as a matter of course, and without a deliberate effort of memory, as far as I have been able to observe. From the first lesson they have been asked to write in phonetic transcription two or three sentences of the written work, the grammar providing them with all the apparatus necessary. It is worth noting that advanced students in phonetics, who have to approach the use of the symbols less deliberately, complain more vigorously than our beginners.

By what names are the students to designate the symbols? It is manifestly absurd and unscientific to adopt symbols for sounds in order to get away from the traditional notation, and then straightway to give to these symbols names that fail to indicate their supposed values. If the class is to be allowed to call [j], **jay**, and [r] **arr**, and [u], **you** it seems to me that the students are simply being encouraged to strengthen old incorrect associations and to form new ones. It is, therefore, my practice to insist from the beginning that the symbols be called by names that indicate as accurately as possible the sounds for which they stand. When we wish to speak of the symbol [j] we pronounce the sound it represents, with a following vowel, if need be; similarly for [S] or for [a]. The students do not take to this too readily; they have an odd sort of self-consciousness about it, but they neither hear nor use the incorrect terminology in class, thus avoiding at least one negative influence. This is not a grave matter, but nothing is to be gained by adopting a line of march and then encouraging straggling.

If in the early days of the year, the plan outlined above has been

followed in its essentials, the pronunciation work for the days that follow is already indicated. It is a good practice to put on the board several times each week lists of words, now in the ordinary transcription, now in phonetic symbols, or, perhaps, detached syllables, in order to review and to test the class. These are run over rapidly, with especial attention to the students whose ears are dull or who have trouble with particular sounds. The vocabulary of the lesson in advance is pronounced by the instructor and the class, accompanied by remarks on new or difficult details, students read aloud and hear read all the exercises in the text, and do a part of each written exercise in phonetic transcription, which they are to read aloud. When the reading text is taken up, about the fourth or fifth week, similar practice on a larger scale is continued, and at an early stage of this the instructor reads aloud repeatedly and assigns for study a short passage, a paragraph or two, in which the class is to try to reproduce the movement of the phrase, as well as to make the sounds correctly.

In the third and fourth quarters (last three months of the first college year and first three of the second) we are trying the experiment of using a phonetic reader,⁷ hoping more effectively to fix the student's attention on the proper practice in regard to elision, liaison, breath grouping, intonation, and all those other matters which are even more important than the correct pronunciation of the individual sounds and words, and a hundred times more difficult to teach. The student reads repeatedly the same passage until the eye no longer meets with any difficulty, or he learns a passage or a poem by heart by reading it over and over. He should, it is argued, be able then to fix his attention entirely on the débit, having removed all the barriers possible, leaving as short a gap as possible between perception and utterance, thus finding himself as nearly as possible in the position of some one speaking. My own experience with this auxiliary was encouraging; so much so that I shall use it again, more vigorously.

V

It may seem to the teacher who has never taken notes on himself, and on what he does when introducing his class to French pronun-

⁷S. A. Richards, *Phonetic French Reader*, Dutton, N. Y.; Ballard and Tilly, *Phonetic French Reader*, Scribner's, N. Y.

ciation, that the material set down above is too abundant, that it can not be adequately presented in the manner indicated and leave time for other things. It would be of interest if such a teacher would observe accurately his own activities in the early pronunciation period and set down just what he does during the first three weeks, and how he does it. He would be surprised at the extent and variety of the material he has presented, and at the number of times he has made use of practical phonetics.

This method of treating pronunciation is more difficult than the old imitative process in the sense that it demands more time and thought of the teacher in planning his presentation, as well as in seeking light from recognized sources⁸ on matters that give him trouble; but it is certainly more interesting, as it appeals to his intelligence and exercises his ingenuity. However, as this is an expository and not an argumentative article, let us pass at once to the concluding observations, four in number.

1. All the work done as outlined above will be comparatively useless unless it is followed up by diligent repetition and practice throughout at least 125 to 150 recitation periods. Physiological explanations and diagrams are futile unless made the basis of constant and intelligent effort to form accurate associations in the pupil's mind. In all cases the initiative must come, of course, from the instructor, but no other method of presenting the matter to students of high school and college age can give them such a definite and satisfactory basis for individual effort and home practice in overcoming their particular defects in pronouncing French.

2. Even the most intelligent application of phonetic aids to pronunciation will not, in a short time, totally change the speech habits of American students of college age. One year does not suffice to do that, nor two, except in rare cases; they may learn to pronounce really quite correctly and to read aloud intelligently, but I have still to find a way of having them acquire a sufficiently vivid sense of the music of the French sentence as to reproduce it successfully. They have had no training in reading aloud in their own language, nor do they always know that a sentence often

⁸For example: Rousselot, *Précis de prononciation française*, Paris, Welter, 1902; Nicholson, *Introduction to French Pronunciation*, London, Macmillan, 1909; Martinon, *Comment on prononce le français*, Paris, Larousse, 1913; Michaelis—Passy, *Dictionnaire phonétique français*; International French Pronouncing Dictionary, Hinds, Noble & Eldredge, N. Y.

conveys more than the information or the statement contained in it: why should they not be slow in recognizing that the French sentence is often made for the ear almost more than for the eye? But this difficulty confronts all teachers, regardless of the method that they use. It is here that imitation must play the chief rôle. There are certain helpful diagrams⁹ to be sure, but the instructor's own way of reading aloud, supplemented by models on the phonograph, must be peculiarly the standard.

3. It is impossible to weigh and measure precisely the results from one method as opposed to another, unless one can be absolutely sure that both are being employed by teachers of equal competence in classes of equal mental ability. However, in so far as I am able to observe and evaluate my own teaching of pronunciation in beginning French classes, it has gained in interest and effectiveness for me and for my classes as we have used simply and discreetly the elementary physiological language material presented in these pages.

4. If it be admitted that it is worth while to teach French in colleges as a living language, that it is good pedagogy to bring the ear as well as the eye into play for acquiring a vocabulary, and to create a more active attitude toward the subject through the interest that a rational, demonstrable treatment of pronunciation rarely fails to arouse; if after the preliminary detailed exposition of the mechanics of making French sounds, we weave our phonetic drill about the material that the student is mastering, and make it clear that all this is an excellent means to a desirable end, and not merely a new sort of grimoire that he must decipher and learn by rote—if the instructor does that, the time needed for a common sense application of phonetic principles to the teaching of pronunciation to beginners is well applied, and should by no means be regarded as so much subtracted from the all too few hours that we have to spend with our elementary French classes.

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⁹Klinghardt und de Fourmestaux, *Französische Intonationsübungen*. Cöthen, 1911.